6: Grigolia E-4, 5 (no date) 1939 RI1 Georgia RI1

162 "According to official data," writes N. Dmitriev,[24] "at the present time (1895) in Free Svanetia there are not more than 715 homes, with inhabitants of 5,801 souls, comprising 3,116 males and 2,585 females. (See the table: Distribution of the Population in the Communities of Free Svanetia.) The predominance of men above women is explicable through the custom of putting babies of the female sex to death. This custom, according to the testimony of well-informed people, is almost discarded but not entirely, and from time to time is still practiced secretly, without the knowledge of the authorities."

● 851 The preference of boys over girls and the importance attached to the birth of a male child in a family of Svans is expressed in the custom of the happy father throwing two bullets into the crib of his new-born son. Describing this custom the Frenchman R. Bernoville[25] erroneously regards it as a meaningless degeneration of the Christian rite of baptism, and accordingly he writes concerning the matter: "La baptême, tombé dans beaucoup de lieux en désuétude, est remplacé ici par l'immersion et l'onction simulée par la mère elle-même en présence du papas; là; par une comédie consistant à jeter dans le berceau do nouveau-né une balle du fusil."

The Russian investigator, I. A. Bartolomei, agrees with M. Bernoville that this custom takes the place of Christian baptism, but it has, according to his poinion, at the same time a more significant meaning than baptism. "The ceremony of baptism

162 DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION IN THE COMMUNITIES OF FREE SAVANETIA*

Communities	*Homes*	*Males*	*Females*
Ipari	133	570	459
Kali	64	236	189
Latali	121	506	489
Lendjeri	70	351	317
Mestia	101	468	392
Mulakhi	151	700	596
Ushkul	75	285	243
		Total — 5801 souls of both sexes.	

Total — 5801 souls of both sexes.

[24] Dimitriev: 166.
[25] Bernoville: 103.
*Data furnished by N. Dmitrieve, in his work, p. 166. Result of his voyage into Svanetia in the summer of 1895.

6: Grigolia E-4, 5 (no date) 1939 RI1 Georgia RI1

among the Svans," writes Mr. Bartolomei,[26] "in the present state of decline of Christianity, bears evidence of the hopes which are placed in the sons and the constant care shown them by their fathers. The ceremony itself consists of the father throwing two bullets into the crib of the new-born son, one for himself and the other for the baby. These two bullets express the ties with which father and son are bound. In his son the father sees not only the preserver of his family but also a helper in the blood-feud whenever his honor is molested, and vengeance is more important to him than his very life."

Disagreeing with the author in describing this custom as a form of baptism, we admit that the Svan father, in throwing two bullets into the crib, considers one for himself and the other for his son. These two bullets are believed to express the beginning of close ties uniting the father and son. In his son the father sees a helper and defender of their common interests in blood-feuds. So this custom represents neither a degeneration of the Christian custom of baptism nor the mere "comedie," as M. Bernoville thinks. Nor has it any other religious meaning; its sole purpose and intention is entirely practical and vital. By this custom the father and son are bound together for life, to safeguard each other and their family. This Svan custom is similar to the exchange of bullets in the adoption ceremony practiced by the Khevsurs.[27]

Created by living conditions and having a rational basis, the custom of infanticide has been given a superstitious interpretation by the people. Thus the Svans believe that for every girl killed God will send the parents a son. "Through their wild superstition the Svans are convinced," writes the Georgian investigator, D. Z. Bakradze,[28] "that the murder of a daughter is rewarded with the birth of a son." This statement is confirmed by D. Margiani.[29] "The Svan women," he writes, "believed that for killing girls they

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[26] Bartolomei: 160.
[27] See "Adoption."
[28] Bakradze: 42.
[29] Margiani: 75.